



# THE LOCAL HEALTH LINK

Stimulating Shorts from Frankfort

## THANK YOU!

*-submitted by Rice C. Leach, MD,  
Commissioner, Dept. for Public  
Health*

I want everyone involved with public health in Kentucky (state staff, district and local staff, hospitals, individual physicians, boards of health, legislators, county judges, and other concerned citizens) to know how proud I am to be associated with Kentucky Public Health. As this year draws to a close and things ease up a bit for the holidays, take some time to consider all the impressive things you have done and pat yourselves on the back. You earned it. You presented a first class "Governor's Conference on the Future of Public Health" during the same time you were responding to the flood emergency. You have initiated a long needed strategic planning process for public health. Your district and local health leaders along with key state staff are

developing a variety of responses to private sector competition for the Medicaid patients. Two different approaches to partnerships in Louisville and Lexington, defining options for involvement in the Barren River District, and community based planning in Northern Kentucky are but a few examples of this. You have worked to implement a fundamental reorganization of the way the department relates among its divisions and with the health departments. You have sketched out a "public health--basic" benefits package that reflects both state and district/local concerns. You have produced and reviewed an updated and significantly improved Disaster Response and Recovery Plan for public health. You have helped us get ready for the 21st century by contributing to the design of an information system that will meet our needs. You have reduced tuberculosis to the lowest levels since we started recording such data and you have improved the chances of survival for a significant number of Kentucky's women who were diagnosed with breast cancer. It's rewarding to see

this happen under any circumstances. It is heart warming to see it happen when it gets done by busy people who found a better way to do the job. I frequently tell people that this is the best job I ever had because of the nature of the work, the mission, the people we serve, and especially the people who make it happen...you. Please be sure to enjoy your families and your friends during this Holiday Season.

## ACH Anecdotes

**Fen-Phen:** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a warning last week about "herbal fen-phen," an alternative to the weight-loss drug combination of fenfluramine and phentermine. Fenfluramine and a variant, dexfenfluramine (known as Redux), were pulled from the market in September after being linked to deadly heart valve complications. Since then, some companies have offered an herbal version of the popular fen-phen combination as a "natural alternative" to the

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prescription drug. The herbal combination often mixes ephedra, commonly known as Ma Huang, a powerful stimulant, with St. John's Wort, an herb used to treat depression. The possible side effects of combining the two herbs have not been carefully studied yet. Other combinations include 5-hydroxy-tryptophan, a compound closely related to L-tryptophan, which was pulled off the market in 1990 after being linked to a rare blood disorder. The FDA considers "herbal fen-phen" combinations to be unapproved drugs because their names reflect that they are intended for the same use as the anti-obesity drugs.

*-submitted by Nutrition Branch staff, Division of Adult and Child Health and excerpted from the November 14, 1997 issue of Nutrition Week, Community Nutrition Institute, Washington, D.C.*

## Central Office Comments

**Notes from the Field:** On recent trips to the Lincoln Trail District and the Lake Cumberland District, I met staff from the counties in the eastern part of their districts (we'll get to the western counties later on).

Lincoln Trail District Health Department: *Nelson County* reported good progress in improving its immunization status, responding to the March floods, and support of new sewer systems going in soon.

*Washington County* staff commented on significant growth in the home health program, increasing immunization rates, and a growing coalition to address issues related to teen pregnancy. They report receiving a bequest from the estate of a grateful county resident, and a

major reduction in tuberculosis compared to last year because, in the words of Paula Mattingly, "I sought them out and got them in" for services. How about that for a back to the future approach to achieving public health outcomes.

*Larue County* reports seeing 25% of the population of the county for at least one service, giving 10% of the population flu shots, and significantly increasing the volume of work in the presence of a reduced staff. The day I was there, someone from the Central office had come to help them during the busy morning and had gone to help somewhere else in the afternoon.

At *Hardin County*, I was able to see what can happen when the health department and the Commission of Children with Special Health Needs are in the same building and I met one billing clerk who reports a substantial increase in payments from third party payers due to industrial strength "nagging" until the money comes in. Other staff in *Hardin County* work to confirm that patients will be available when home health staff are in the field. This increases productivity by reducing the number of "no show" home visits.

Lake Cumberland District Health Department: Folks in the *Lake Cumberland District* office talked a lot about their work to educate vendors, staff, and patients about WIC and what it can do for them. The health education section of that district has several ongoing programs including the Postponing Sexual Involvement initiative which is active in 29 schools, has 85 teams, and some 250 teenage leaders. I asked a lot of questions but to me the keeper came from the younger children who said, "We never forget what those teenagers told us."

In *Russell County* I learned about their increases in prenatal, well child, and immunization as well as their efforts to get young girls back in school after they have babies. They also mentioned efforts involving several other groups designed to prevent teenage pregnancy.

*Clinton County* staff have become quite well known for their efforts to reduce tuberculosis. An epidemic which started in a work site in Tennessee reached into *Clinton County*, necessitated involvement of the CDC, and has resulted in two full time tuberculosis workers. They have made a significant dent in the transmission of the disease and have started receiving calls from other providers regarding best practices for managing tuberculosis in the community.

*Wayne County* has been working on flu and pneumonia vaccines for their older patients and went out of their way to congratulate Dr. Imaad Khdaire for his efforts to refer women for mammograms. A study done not long ago indicated that physicians frequently fail to discuss the benefits of breast examination and mammography with women at risk for the disease. Dr. Khdaire and his staff have been identified as excellent examples of how private medicine and public health can work together to reduce a major problem. Other significant activities in *Wayne County* include their community coordinating group which has identified drug addiction, substance abuse, and family abuse as important public health problems.

In *McCreary County*, breast cancer is also being addressed by the combined efforts of the public health department, the private physicians, the Home Place workers, and the Christian Care Center. They report

increased screening and attribute the change to efforts by the health department, to school children taking seed packets home to announce screening, to announcements mailed in bank statements, the Home Place audiovisual program, and to Ms. Diane Sexton who is a nurse practitioner in a local physician's office. Other important activities include environmental health work in distributing rat bait (a district initiative) and an animal rabies vaccination clinic. Community discussions have identified drug abuse as a significant problem.

In *Pulaski County*, we visited the Southern Middle School health clinic to talk about communicable disease control, immunizations, physical examinations and other activities to be sure that the children have the best opportunity possible to learn while they are in school.

At the health department in *Bowling Green* we heard about their community initiative in breast cancer screening and their prenatal classes that stress smoking cessation, exercise, and eight other ways to improve your baby's health. They also talked about how they support the community with information on tuberculosis control, rabies control, and dog bites. The clinic was humming late on a Friday afternoon and it was described as "a little lighter than usual" by Dr. Chris Whelan.

*-submitted by Rice C. Leach, MD, Commissioner, Dept for Public Health*

## Lab Lines

**Attention All Clinical and Environmental Staff:**

**CORRECTION:** An error was made

in one of the permanent addresses listed in last month's Local Health Link. The correct permanent addresses for all means of shipping are listed below:

### *Letter Mail & Rabies Specimens:*

Division of Laboratory Services  
100 Sower Blvd., Ste. 204  
Frankfort, KY 40601

### *Newborn Screening Specimens:*

(no change)

Division of Laboratory Services  
P.O. Box 2010  
Frankfort, KY 40602

### *All Other Specimens:*

Division of Laboratory Services  
100 Sower Blvd.  
North Loading Dock  
P.O. Box 2020  
Frankfort, KY 40602-2020

If you have questions, please call Donna Clindenbeard or Bill Gosney at 502-564-4446. Thank you for your patience as we strive to improve this system.

*-submitted by Donna Clindenbeard, Division of Laboratory Services*

## Training Tidbits

### **RTC Training Courses Offered -**

**FY 1998:** The Regional Training Center (RTC), Atlanta, GA, will be conducting fifteen (15) training courses for local health department (LHD) personnel during the current fiscal year. These efforts are being coordinated through the Department for Public Health, Training and Development Branch. These are one-day sessions, and there is no fee for those individuals attending these courses. As you will notice, the training locations are being spread to more regions of the state to make the offerings more accessible to all LHD staff in an effort to reduce costs and

to make it easier for staff to attend these trainings.

Information concerning the first seven (7) courses has already been mailed to District Training Coordinators and single county LHDs. The remaining mailings will be forwarded to LHDs approximately four (4) months prior to each training course. Course dates, locations, and titles are listed below.

1/30/98 Bowling Green  
- STD Update

2/6/98 Lexington  
- Postponing Sexual Involvement

3/27/98 Somerset  
- Current Reproductive Health Issues-RNs

3/27/98 Lexington  
- Evaluating Your Program

4/3/98 Owensboro  
- Abnormal Pap Smears

4/17/98 Lexington  
- Family Violence

4/24/98 Bowling Green  
- HIV / AIDS Update

5/1/98 Lexington  
- Orientation for New Family Planning RNs

5/21-22/98 Lexington  
- Current Reproductive Health Issues-Clinicians

5/29/98 Ashland  
- Counseling Adolescents

6/12/98 Dawson Springs  
- Handling Difficult People

6/19/98 Morehead  
- TB: Meeting the New Challenge

Should you have any questions regarding this information, please contact Bob Hurst at (502) 564-4990.

**Videos on Loan:** If you have any outstanding videotapes on loan for more than three (3) weeks, please return them to me at the address given in the Editor's Note. Thank you for your cooperation.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

Please submit articles, staff spotlight nominees, or suggestions for the newsletter to:

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**EDITOR'S HOLIDAY NOTE:** As another year draws to a close, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your interest, your articles, and your support of this newsletter. My sincere wishes for you and your families to enjoy a safe and happy holiday season - Sandy